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COURTESY OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

# Issues of Authorship in the Portrait Photographs of Seydou Keïta

**ELIZABETH BIGHAM**

**A**t first glance a portrait by the Malian photographer Seydou Keïta might appear to provoke few questions of authorship such as those addressed in this and the previous issue of *African Arts* (Autumn 1998). After all, a visitor to New York's Museum of Modern Art or the Metropolitan Museum of Art—both of which have recently collected Keïta's work<sup>1</sup>—today encounters a photograph linked to a personal name, plainly labeled: "Untitled, Seydou Keïta, born 1921, Bamako, Mali" (Fig. 2).<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless the original production and the ongoing reception of Keïta's portrait photographs have in fact involved many authors and models of authorship, and, indeed, lost and regained personal names. Authorship is arguably both a central dynamic and a recurring issue of Keïta's work.

Seydou Keïta operated a highly successful commercial portrait studio in Bamako from approximately 1948 to 1964, spanning the era of Mali's nascent independence from French colonial rule. His subjects were first and foremost his clients; their patronage initiated each photographic image. According to the photographer himself (Magnin 1997:10), they chose Keïta over a handful of competitors because of his greater reputation as an aesthetic author and his better visibility in the marketplace of portrait photography. His name was prized, but not in isolation. Keïta's viewers were his subjects (and people who knew them), and their names rather than his constituted the primary means of the portraits' identification. Neither were these images viewed in isolation, in the manner of the untitled photograph in the New York museum: they were seen in domestic spaces, intimately and contextually bound to their subjects.

The names of these subjects are now lost. The photographer did not record the identities of the thousands of Malians who passed through his studio, and the photographs presently on exhibit are not vintage prints purchased from their first owners but 1990s reprints made in Paris from his original negatives. The subjects' current anonymity marks a significant

shift in authorship, for it belies the fact that they, not Keïta, were responsible for the portraits' genesis. Their engagement in the authoring of their portraits is not unique to Keïta's studio, but their collaboration is integral to his practice. It was the subjects' desire for an ideal self-image, rather than the photographer's desire to make art, that led them to his door. Indeed, one can argue that they not only provided the photographs' literal content but also engaged in their own transformations into aesthetic images.<sup>3</sup>

Keïta's name was once also lost. Although the photographer remained famous in Mali even after his retirement in 1977, before gaining his current international visibility his works were briefly shown in New York as photographs by an unknown author in the 1991 exhibition "Africa Explores." As I will show here, the recovery of authorial identity involved more than a simple resurrection of Keïta's name. It also entailed new definitions of his authorship. Keïta's portraits did not travel directly from the living rooms of 1950s Bamako to the most potent Western institutions of cultural legitimization in either a literal or an epistemological sense. His authorship has likewise been subject to marked reinterpretation by various curators, collectors, and scholars.<sup>4</sup>

### Postmodern Critiques of Authorship: The Subject as Author

In using the term "author" in place of the more conventional term for makers of images, I mean to situate my examination of the production and reception of Keïta's work in relation to the critiques of authorship offered by Roland Barthes (1967) and Michel Foucault (1969). Just over thirty years ago Barthes declared, famously, "the death of the Author." In so doing he meant to mark the passing of the model of the writer as an autonomous, original master (suggested by the Latin root *auctor*, "creator"; Little 1955:125), analogous to the post-Renaissance model of the artist that was dominant in Europe and America from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. Barthes meant just as definitively to reject the belief in a universal or natural authorial model. Rather than being transcendent, he argued, authorship is particular to history, culture, and ideology. Soon thereafter, Foucault, describing what he called the "author function," argued even more insistently for the contingency of authors to the contexts both of their production and their reception. For example, neither Barthes nor Foucault would presumably propose to match Keïta the author with, say, Berenice Abbott or Bamgboye the author. Neither would they attempt to match Keïta the author in a Bamako portrait studio with Keïta the author in a New York museum.<sup>5</sup>

Also germane here is Barthes's and Foucault's conception of the liberating possibilities available to cultural consumers given the demise of the model of the autonomous author. No longer in a closed one-to-one relationship with the author as its "final signified," the text might henceforth address and open itself to the reader as a participant in the work's production of meaning (Barthes 1967:145).<sup>6</sup> For Barthes, especially, this led inevitably to the engagement of the reader as an author. Commercial portrait photography is of course profoundly focused on its "readers": they are its patrons, subjects, and viewers. This focus is an especially salient feature of Keïta's work, as it is of much contemporaneous west African commercial portrait photography.<sup>7</sup>

The subject of a portrait photograph acts as an author first by initiating its commission and second by bringing to it its literal contents: the subject chooses to represent the self and conceives how that self will be represented. He or she then engages in a negotiation of authorship with the photographer, who interprets the specific self before the camera both through the genre's structuring conventions and through individual aesthetic choices concerning lighting, framing, and composition. The subject, as Barthes argued in a famous essay on photography, splits into four "image-repertoires," themselves variously authored: "In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art" (1981:13). In Keïta's portraits it is arguably the second and fourth of Barthes's selves—the subject's ideal and the photographer's stylized representation of it—that are most often manifest and that most manifestly form the basis of the collaborative endeavor.

Many of the conventions of the genre as it has been practiced by west African commercial portrait photographers collectively elicit or heighten the impression of the subject's presentation of self rather than the subject's interpretation by the photographer: the pictorial characteristics of these images include compositional centrality and stability, with centrally fixed figures often shown frontally, fully, and within a shallow picture space (Sprague 1978:54–55; Vogel 1991:116). The sense of the subjects' participation has also been linked to the extreme immobility and equilibrium with which they often pose. Susan Vogel observes: "[The subjects'] formality sometimes seems to go beyond decorum to suggest that they are collaborating with the photographer in the creation of a somewhat stylized presentation of themselves" (Vogel, p. 116). More immediately expressive of the portrait subjects' mediation are the accessories and studio props that were made available to them by Keïta and many

All photographs by Seydou Keïta (born ca. 1921, Bamako, Mali).

1. Untitled portrait, 1956–57, print 1996. Gelatin silver print; 39.1cm x 55.2cm (15.4" x 21.7"). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Anonymous Gift, 1997 (1997.267).

The sitter's contained formality and Keïta's tight focus work together to push the portrait genre to the limits of stylized abstraction. The dignified repose of the reclining subject is magnified by a camera angle that makes her seem to tilt slightly out of the picture plane. Keïta has excised all that is neither portrait subject nor patterned surface, thereby intensifying the rhythmic play of pattern and the sitter's own monumentality.

other photographers, from the renowned Mama Casset and Salla Casset of Dakar to Hamadou Bocoum of Mopti (Pivin 1994; Sokkelund 1996). A recent documentary film on contemporary Ghanaian portrait photographers by Tobias Wendl and Nancy du Plessis amply illustrates how subjects may negotiate their representation through dress, pose, and their selection of and interaction with illusionistic painted backdrops (Wendl & du Plessis 1998).

### The Dynamics of Collaboration

It is therefore not surprising that participation by the subject should be apparent in Keïta's portrait photographs. But if the sharing of authorship by photographer

and client is not unique to his practice, it is nevertheless worthy of attention, for reasons having to do with both the production and the reception of his photographs. First, many of the pictorial devices which are salient in Keïta's aesthetic practice are specifically related to his subjects, in the sense that they emerge from his response to what his clients bring to the portrait session. To be sure, Keïta employs more detached aesthetic strategies, such as elegant compositional and framing motifs (as in his controlled glimpses of the corners and floor of his studio). Other pictorial devices, however, are closely engaged with, and even dependent on, the portrait subjects themselves: pattern, symmetry, repeated forms, and the stylized treatment of dress and gesture. Second, it is im-

portant to emphasize the collaborative authoring of Keïta's portraits precisely because this quality may so easily be obscured given the remarkable renown—greater than that of any other African portrait photographer to date—that he has achieved in the international art world.

Keïta's portrait images reveal that, in the encounter in the studio, authorship slipped back and forth between client and artist, and sometimes straddled intention and serendipity. Surveying several of the portraits, one forms aesthetic judgments about the photographer's varying degrees of success in framing, lighting, and composing individual sessions. But one also senses that some subjects were more effective than others in self-depiction. Some *bamakois* came to the studio attired as if they already had conceived of themselves as an aesthetic image, as if they had in mind some aspect of Keïta's aesthetic, such as his skillful manipulation of repetition and symmetry (Fig. 3). The resulting image bears evidence of this aesthetic self-conception as well as the photographer's response to his clients, what he made of them as photographic subjects. Many of the subjects consciously buttressed or elaborated their self-image with accessories provided by Keïta. Others arrived dressed in cloths that provoked lushly cacophonous juxtapositions with Keïta's patterned backdrops (Figs. 1, 2). The resulting painterly play of pattern upon pattern and of two- and three-dimensionality, one of the most familiar pictorial devices of Keïta's portraits, is, as the photographer has often described it, the unpredictable consequence of what he and his clients each brought to the portrait session. Instead of choosing a backdrop to suit a particular sitting, Keïta used the same patterned cloth for every sitting—and for up to four years at a time. Thus, "Sometimes the background went well with their clothes, especially for the women, but it was all haphazard" (Keïta, in Magnin 1997:12).<sup>8</sup>

Keïta gave his sitters the opportunity to participate in their transformation within the idealizing space of the studio mise-en-scène. Sometimes his motivation was simply pragmatic: for example, Keïta lined the walls of his studio with portraits



COURTESY OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

2. Untitled portrait, 1956, print 1997. Gelatin silver print; 61cm x 50.8cm (24" x 20"). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Joseph and Ceil Mazer Foundation Inc. Gift, 1997 (1997.362).

The photographer's fabric backdrops create a shallow picture space that heightens the subject's visual and psychological impact. The dynamic contrast between the leaf-patterned cloth and the subject's chevron-printed dress was fortuitous, for the backdrop was not chosen specifically for this sitting but was used for sittings throughout 1956. Keïta artfully arranged the woman's dress to take advantage of its graphic and compositional potential and to accentuate her graceful, turning pose.

representing a typology of poses and arrangements, so that customers could come without an appointment and still choreograph their portraits with ease and efficiency. "Clients said to me: 'I want to be photographed like this, you see?... And I did it." But if the client chose a pose that Keïta did not deem flattering, he would assert authorial command and propose a more suitable one: "I was never wrong" (Magnin 1995:92).

Other opportunities for clients' participation involved more culturally coded choices on the part of photographer and subject. Responding to the incipient chic of Western-style dress, Keïta equipped his studio with a veritable wardrobe of European suits, ties, and hats. He also made available a range of accessories small and large, from watches, pens, a tea set, and paper flowers to a radio, alarm clock, and scooter. His customers—especially the male ones, who in the 1950s were more susceptible to changes in urban styles of dress (Cissé 1995)—could select an entire ensemble or a single accessory capable of signifying their modernity, cosmopolitanism, and prosperous elegance. Some subjects even posed in front of the photographer's car. In one of these portraits (see Magnin 1995:91), the conjunction of client and photographer is pictured literally: Keïta's image is reflected in the car's surface, just to the right of his posing subjects.

One can isolate diverse strategies of self-depiction in these portraits. Some sitters employed the studio aids as props, in a manner at once literal and symbolic, as in the portrait of a man supporting himself as he leans atop a radio that asserts his self-conscious modernity (Fig. 4). Others staged themselves more creatively, as in the portrait of a young man (once wrongly identified as a self-portrait; Cissé 1995) who holds up a single paper flower in a gesture both offertory and self-reflective (Fig. 5). This artificial blossom appears in the background of other portraits in a more prosaic arrangement of a vase of flowers (e.g., Magnin 1997:81). In a portrait taken in 1952–55 (published in Diawara 1998:65), a single shoe is perched on the skirt of a crouching young woman's dress. It is simultaneously a blunt commodity fetish and an expressive individual emblem that has been arranged by the photographer on

an elegant axis with the sitter's handbag and face. Although the ethnographer Youssouf Cissé explains this placement as merely a matter of "preventing [her skirt] from blowing back" (1997:280), Keïta remembers that the shoe, which belonged to the sitter, "was a new model, and she wanted me to show it" (Anginot 1995).

Keïta has frequently underscored the close relationship between aesthetic practice and customer satisfaction in recollections of his professional practice. He frames the interaction between photographer and client as a negotiation based on his necessary responsiveness to the desires of his client-subjects: "You always have to come up with ideas to please the customer....After all, the customer is only trying to look as good as possible"

(Magnin 1997:11–12). Keïta's emphasis on these factors implicitly establishes that his sense of his authorship comprises a heterogeneity both of authors (photographer and client) and of catalysts (aesthetic and economic).

### The Bamako Studio Practice

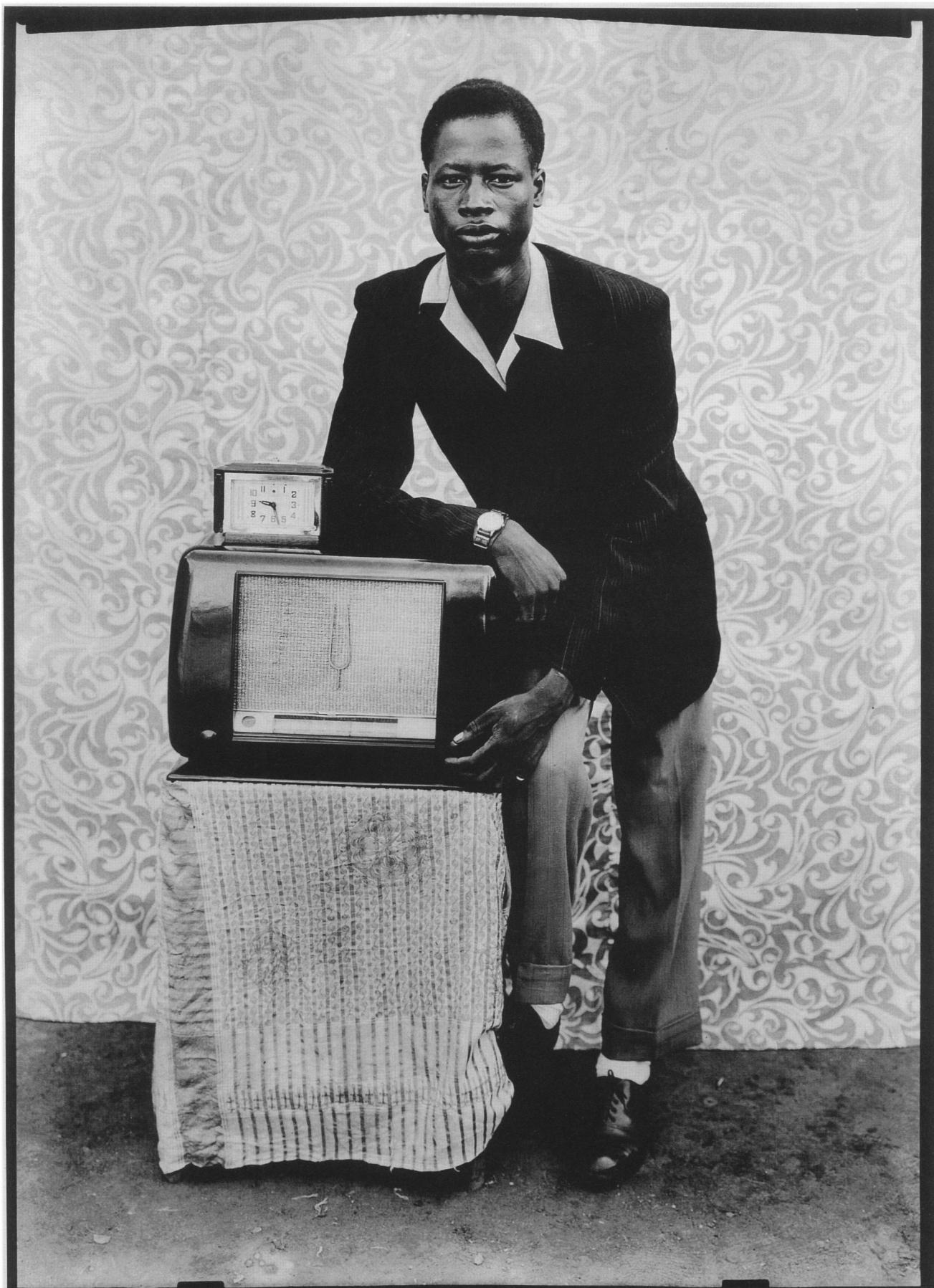
Keïta's career as a photographer began with the serendipitous gift of a camera from his paternal uncle, Tièmòkò Keïta. A love and facility for using it rapidly followed: "I was mad about photography" (Anginot 1995). Although in 1994 Keïta dated this gift to 1945, in more recent conversations both he and his uncle have recalled it as occurring in 1935; the earlier date allows for a much longer period



COURTESY OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

3. Untitled portrait, 1959–1960, print 1997. Gelatin silver print; 61cm x 50.8cm (24" x 20"). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Joseph and Ceil Mazer Foundation Inc. Gift, 1997 (1997.362).

Both photographer and subject were integral participants in the portrait's conception. In this example, the two women's emotional composure matches their readiness to compose themselves aesthetically, as seen in their identical goldfish-print dresses. By pulling back the curtain to reveal the exterior wall of his studio, Keïta introduces a formal off-centeredness to the otherwise symmetrical arrangement.



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Seydou Keïta 10.9.54

Keïta

COURTESY OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

60

african arts • spring 1999

4. Untitled portrait, 1956, print 1997. Gelatin silver print; 61cm x 50.8cm (24" x 20"). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Joseph and Ceil Mazer Foundation Inc. Gift, 1997 (1997.363).

Keïta helped his clients collaborate in staging their portraits by giving them a choice of European-style suits and accessories like the radio and clock seen here. His portrait subjects employed these props as evocative emblems of the aspirations of 1950s *bamakois* modernity. This young man at once casually adjusts the radio and uses it to fortify his pose.

of experimentation before the opening of the studio practice in Bamako-Koura in 1948 or 1949.<sup>9</sup> From age seven Keïta had been trained as a carpenter by his father, and he never attended public school. At first, while still working as a carpenter, he photographed his family and co-workers. Possibly in 1939 he began to take commissioned portraits of clients in the street or in their homes, initially because people noticed him walking around with his camera and asked him to take their pictures (Magnin 1997:9, 17). His judgment of this early work admits to errors both psychological and practical: he was nervous in front of his subjects, and either he moved or they did; he did not yet have his own studio and therefore was not able to control the mise-en-scène; he relied on others to print his photographs (which took a cut from his earnings). Keïta eventually learned darkroom techniques from two older photographers, Pierre Garnier and Mountaga Kouyaté. The former opened the city's first photography supply store, Photo-Hall Soudanais, in 1935 (Nimis 1998:120). Keïta acquired equipment from the latter, whom he has called his "mentor," in 1948 (Magnin 1995:91; 1997:9). His earliest extant portraits date from after the establishment of his studio; he has not been able to locate any of the negatives that date from the period 1935–1947 (Magnin 1997:13).

Keïta has consistently described himself as self-taught. Yet he does so seemingly not to diminish but precisely to foreground the significance of his technical skill and accomplishment. When he tells the story of acquiring his first camera, a 6-cm x 9-cm Kodak Brownie, he often treats it as the full explanation of his transformation into a photographer. "That's the way I began, from scratch, with no training" (Magnin 1997:9). He does not recall exposure to earlier portrait photographers aside from Garnier and Mountaga, and generally limits their influence to teaching him to develop and print, although some comments suggest that he may have had a more extended apprenticeship with Mountaga (Magnin 1995:91; 1997:9). Exposure to Western photographers' work in magazines and newspapers was limited: "I've never met any foreign photographers, nor seen

their photos....French or American books or magazines were very rare [in the 1940s and 1950s]." The one illustrated publication Keïta cites as accessible, though not particularly influential, was the Senegalese general-store catalogue *Manufrance* (Magnin 1997:12). Manthia Diawara has suggested that the studio's proximity to Bamako's Soudan Ciné movie theater may have influenced both the photographer's staging of his portraits and his subjects' own self-styling (Diawara 1998:67).

If Keïta minimizes the extent of his training, he makes no bones about the commercial nature of his production, nor does he neglect to boast of his acuity in advertising and cultivating his studio practice to ensure its economic success in the competitive marketplace of portrait photography. And it was indeed successful: Keïta has said that the profits enabled him to buy two cars in the 1950s and to support three families—his own, his father's, and his uncle's (Magnin 1997:11, 17).<sup>10</sup> One clear advantage of his studio over those of his four primary competitors in 1950s Bamako was its prime location in the center of the new, commercially bustling section of the city, Bamako-Koura (Cissé 1997; Diawara 1998:66–67).<sup>11</sup> Keïta set up shop on land given to him by his father, situated behind the central prison and amid the dense traffic of the train station, the large Marché Rose, the zoo, the post office, and the Soudan Ciné. The photographer was also an aggressive marketer. He sent out assistants, armed with samples of his work, to lure customers from the train station. He rigged up a mobile, kerosene-powered darkroom so that he could expand business into rural areas.

Beyond this perceptive self-promotion, the market itself contributed substantially to Keïta's success. His studio was born during the immense economic and demographic boom that swept Bamako in the years after World War II. The population of the city, a major crossroads of the soon-to-be-former French colonies in west Africa, grew from about 68,000 in 1951 to well over 200,000 by the end of the 1960s (Imperato 1982:31). Keïta's clientele were also beneficiaries of this era of economic expansion. The photographer describes them as "well-to-do people" (Magnin 1995:92), "office clerks and shop-keepers," indeed "all the elite in Bamako" (Anginot 1995). The majority were women and younger people (Magnin 1997:11). Many clients, too, came from outside Bamako; Keïta recalls that one person traveled 100 miles to reach his studio (Anginot 1995), and that another passed through on his way from Benin (Cornand 1998).

Just as crucial as Keïta's business acumen was his perceptive balancing of two demands of the portrait genre: on the one hand, he gave his sitters the opportunity to individualize their image by participating in its production, and on the other, he filtered this individual image through a signature "look" of his own. The photographs do indeed reveal a style sufficiently recognizable that customers could presumably be satisfied that they had acquired not only a portrait but a *Keïta portrait*, which would in turn act as an advertisement to potential customers encountering his work in the living rooms of their fellow *bamakois*. Keïta cited the crisp detail, sharpness, and clarity of line and composition of his photographs as some of the qualities that attracted clients (Magnin 1997:11). These qualities are amply suited to his preferred medium, black-and-white film in a 13-cm x 18-cm format.<sup>12</sup> Other, more intangible factors were his reputation for amplifying his subjects' beauty (Diawara 1998:67) and his popularization of a pose for women in which they are seen from the waist up, bending at a slightly oblique diagonal. He called this his "angled portrait," describing it as his own invention (Magnin 1997:11).

In addition, then, to a flattering portrait image, Keïta's clients apparently desired and purchased an affiliation with his name, which, according to Diawara, was a significant commodity: "Having a portrait taken by Keïta signified one's cosmopolitanism....it signified that the sitter was modern" (1998:67). As the photographer puts it, "I had a rubber stamp 'Photo KEÏTA SEYDOU,' that everybody wanted on their prints" (Magnin 1997:10). But it should be underscored that however much fellow *bamakois* esteemed Keïta as the city's great portrait photographer, they did not prize his name in isolation. Clients did not want his stamp on just any photographic image, but on an image that they identified with themselves and to which they also ascribed as integral their own authorial presences.

As Keïta tells it (Magnin 1997:60–13), in the 1960s his fame led to substantial obstacles to his ability to control his status as an author. In 1960 the Sudanese Republic, renamed the Republic of Mali, achieved full independence from France. Under the presidency of Modibo Keïta, himself one of Seydou Keïta's portrait subjects (Magnin 1997:10), Mali became a one-party state, committed to socialist policies. In 1962 Keïta was offered the position of official government photographer, first by the head of the police and then by the director of Malian national security; he felt he should not refuse the job (Magnin 1997:13), but continued to operate his commercial practice in off-hours for another year, until he was asked to shut the studio down. Keïta remained in his official post with the Sûreté Nationale until his retirement in 1977 (also the year of Modibo Keïta's death in prison). His photographs from

this period are held by the government and remain inaccessible. From 1964 until his retirement, the studio, filled with equipment and the entire archive of his professional practice, remained shut up and in the care of family members, including his brother, Lancina (Loke 1997). After 1977 Keïta did not reopen his portrait practice but did return to his studio, occasionally supplementing his pension by reprinting portraits from the 1950s (French 1997).

### (Re)Constructing Authorship in the West

Since 1948 Keïta has carefully preserved and organized all his negatives, which he estimates to number about 7,000–30,000 (Loke 1997; Magnin 1997:13). That action was crucially important to the subsequent reception of Keïta's work outside Mali. He began the archive because clients would return for reprints (Magnin, p. 10). Yet Keïta's subjects became definitively anonymous upon entering his archival order. Their names are not recorded; in fact, the photographer has said that in many cases he never knew them (Magnin, p. 12). Instead the archive was classified according to broad types (e.g., single half-figures, single full figures, reclining figures, couples, groups) that were subdivided by date and, where relevant, gender (Magnin, p. 10; Anginot 1995). Although Keïta has said that he never anticipated that there would be future exhibits of his work (Loke 1997), his archive was of course perfectly suited to this potential purpose. But even though Keïta gave a group of negatives to the museum in Bamako (Magnin, p. 13)<sup>13</sup> and remained famous there, it was not until some years after being exhibited in major museums in France and the United States that his work was publicly displayed in the Malian capital.

The exhibition and publication of hundreds of images from the archive would ultimately be decisive in engendering the photographer's tremendous celebrity outside his country. Initially, however, Keïta shared anonymity with his subjects: his work was shown in the West without its author's name. In 1991 Susan Vogel included seven of Keïta's portraits in "Africa Explores: 20th Century African Art," organized by the Center (now Museum) for African Art in New York. The show presented a selection of portrait photography in its examination of "urban art" in twentieth-century Africa. Along with the seven Keïta portraits, three of which were illustrated in the accompanying catalogue, were images by photographers from Dakar, Lomé, and Yamoussoukro. None of the photographers were identified by name. Keïta's portraits were credited to an "Unknown photographer (Bamako, Mali)" (Vogel 1991:160–61). They nonetheless figured

prominently in the exhibition project. One of the three images, an intimate, tightly cropped, and subtly orchestrated portrait of a couple, was among the works on the catalogue's cover (Fig. 6). The same portrait, still designated "unknown," was published later that year as the opening image of a special African photography issue of the Parisian journal *Revue Noire*.<sup>14</sup>

While Keïta's status as "unknown" in "Africa Explores" has been cited repeatedly (French 1997; Loke 1997; Magnin 1997), neither the photographer nor the literature has explained how the photographs came to be exhibited there. Consequently, some have seemed to conclude that Keïta's anonymity in that exhibition reflected a lack of scholarly interest in his identity (Magnin, in Anginot 1995)—analogous to colonial-era collecting practices in which Westerners, given the cultural prejudices of the time, simply neglected to ask "Who made this?" But Vogel (personal communication, 1999), recounting her acquisition of the Keïta negatives at a time when there was yet no substantive scholarship on or even interest in the subject, dispels this assumption:

While traveling in west Africa in the summer of 1974, my personal interest and admiration led me to collect negatives and glass plates by African photographers... Among the artists whose negatives I purchased for my own collection were Salla Casset and Seydou Keïta—there were no prints on hand. Whenever we had time that summer, Jerry Vogel and I visited photographers' homes or studios, and I noted basic information about the photographers and their work in my travel papers. I was concerned about removing negatives from their context, and selected only a small sample from the vast quantities I was shown.

At the time of her visit, Keïta was still working as a government photographer, and his then closed studio was in the care of family members, who gave Vogel biographical information on the photographer, along with a small group of negatives from which contact prints were made in New York some months later by the photographer Jerry Thompson. Over a decade and a half separated Vogel's initial, prescient interest in portrait photography from her decision to include photography in "Africa Explores." In the interim, while scholars in the West began to consider photography as an important contemporary African form of expression (Sprague 1978), her notes from this period—including Keïta's name and details about his Bamako studio—were mislaid. The loss of this information was realized only in 1991, after Vogel had selected Keïta's photographs for the

exhibition and catalogue. She explains (personal communication, 1999):

When I wanted to include photography in "Africa Explores" many years later, I could find no better examples than the ones I owned... By then my notes on the photographers had vanished, and there was still virtually no information available in print on African photographers.

Standing in stark contrast to his enduring fame in Mali, Keïta's temporary unnamed status exemplifies how authorship may undergo shifts in the process of reception, particularly when works are transferred to another cultural context. In such a scenario, the ability to identify authorship depends on the work's literal connection to a signature or on its new viewers' knowledge of the author's style. Unlike his vintage prints, Keïta's negatives are not stamped with the name of his studio, and the prints made from them bear no literal signature. In Bamako in 1991, the seven portraits exhibited in "Africa Explores" could readily have been identified through the photographer's stylistic trademarks, but that was not yet the case in New York.

Paradoxically it was Keïta's inclusion in "Africa Explores" that led to his present celebrated status. It is therefore ironic that this exhibition—his first<sup>15</sup>—should have featured him as an artist then "unknown." André Magnin has told the story many times. In 1991 he encountered the seven unattributed photographs in the New York exhibition. His curiosity piqued, he set out to discover their author's name (Magnin 1997:7; Anginot 1995). Armed with the catalogue, he traveled to Bamako: "I showed the catalogue to people in the street, and very quickly, I met someone who told me that these photographs were by Seydou Keïta" (Anginot 1995). The introduction to Keïta was soon made, perhaps by the photographer Malick Sidibé (Magnin 1997:7), and Magnin subsequently made the arrangement that resulted in Keïta's metamorphosis into an internationally known author:

After [Keïta] recognized that I clearly considered his photographs an important Malian treasure, he agreed to entrust me with two hundred negatives that we chose together and counted carefully. From then on, the confidence that was established between us gave me access to tens of thousands of negatives, covering the period from 1948 to 1962, which now form the only available source of Keïta's work.

(Magnin 1997:7)

The negatives loaned to Magnin were taken to Europe and reprinted by the Ateliers Philippe Salaün in Paris, which continues to generate prints for exhibition and sale. A set of these prints became

5. Untitled portrait, 1952–55, print 1997. Gelatin silver print; 51.4cm x 39.6cm (20.3" x 15.6"). The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Gift of Robert Storr in Memory of Sally Ganz.

Keita's subjects used his studio accessories in individual and sometimes unexpected ways. This photograph was once wrongly identified as a self-portrait. The man—whose name Keita recalls as Sissoko—holds up a paper flower that appears in the background of other clients' portraits in a more prosaic arrangement of a vase of flowers (Cissé 1995; Magnin 1997:8).

the basis of the Keita collection owned by Jean-Christophe Pigozzi, whose substantial holdings of contemporary African art constitute the Contemporary African Art Collection (CAAC) in Geneva, for which Magnin acts as curator. New prints have been approved, signed, and dated by Keita, who receives a portion of the earnings from their sale and publication.<sup>16</sup>

The transfer of hundreds of negatives to Magnin provided the basis as well as the impetus for the significant authorial visibility represented by one-person exhibitions and monographs. Also significant were Magnin's connections to private collectors, museums, and the art market. This is most evident in the consolidation of the prints in the CAAC's collection, which then played a role in the circulation of Keita's work in exhibitions in France and elsewhere.<sup>17</sup> The CAAC's Keita collection also comprises all the illustrations in Magnin's recently published monograph (1997) and in the CD-ROM by Dominique Anginot (1995). Further, Magnin's ongoing role as Keita's primary interlocutor is noteworthy: his edited interviews form the core of the photographer's statements about his art. As I and others have relied heavily on these texts, Magnin has continued to play a significant role in the reception of Keita's work.<sup>18</sup>

### New Contexts, New Interpretations

Since the mid-1990s, photographs by Keita have been almost constantly on view in Western museums. Five years after "Africa Explores," the photographer was given his first solo exhibition in this country, organized by Christraud Geary for the National Museum of African Art. This was followed by exhibitions at museums around the country, including, most recently, the Saint Louis Art Museum and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, where Keita's was the first one-person exhibition of an African artist the institution had ever mounted.<sup>19</sup> His work was also included in the 1996 exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum, "In/sight: African Photography, 1940 to the Present."<sup>20</sup>

The portraits have also been increasingly visible in the art market: large-format signed prints (the largest were 50" x 70") were exhibited and sold at the Gagosian Gallery in both Los Angeles and New York



COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

in 1997. Simultaneously they have become part of the permanent collections of major museums, where they have been displayed according to orders of institutional classification still relatively unusual even for living African artists. For example, when an image of a reclining woman (Fig. 1) was featured in the permanent-collection galleries of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Department of Photographs in the summer of 1998, Keita became possibly the first living African artist to be exhibited in the museum outside the Michael C. Rockefeller Wing galleries of "traditional" African art. There was equally striking evidence of Keita's new currency as a player on the world stage of contemporary art: one of his photographs (Fig. 4) was published on the cover of *Artforum* (February 1998).

The transformation of Keita's archive from a carefully preserved but unseen repository of negatives into a collectively

displayed aesthetic corpus entails authorial shifts above and beyond the recovery and reinscription of Keita's name. On the most obvious level, looking at these portraits through the institutional frame of an exhibition or a monograph shapes an encounter quite different from that experienced by viewers in 1950s Bamako. For the latter, the photographer's authorial presence, while extremely significant, was filtered through their relationship with the portrait subject and their appreciation of that person's desire to author an ideal image of self. They saw isolated works or, in the photographer's studio, small groupings. Viewers of the exhibition or monograph, however, are provided a single name, the photographer's (the overwhelming majority of Keita's subjects are still unidentified); they confront quantities of photographs, one after the other, so that the specificity of each subject is inevitably overshadowed by their dis-



cernment of aesthetic consistency and homogeneity in the corpus as a whole. A single portrait takes on a different authorial status: rather than forming the nexus of a specific photographic session and its duality of authors, it exists as part of a total body of work, as a synecdoche for the oeuvre's aesthetic as borne out in repeated strategies of framing, composition, and arrangement. Anginot (1995) has called this the "fiction" of the "synoptical reading" of Keïta's portraits. This way of viewing seems all the more anomalous given the suddenness and totality with which this photographer's oeuvre became visible: had it been received incrementally, as is usual with most living artists, this "synoptical reading" would have appeared less overtly inconsistent with the images' original context of reception.

64

Just as the authorship of Keïta's portraits is concentrated and condensed in their new context of viewing, so is it redefined by the various interpretations of its Western audience. Given the relocation of the portraits from the particularities of 1950s Bamako to the much broader teleologies and canon formations of world art history, perhaps the least surprising of these re-authorings is Keïta's implicit isolation as a paradigmatic African photographer. Compared to the almost thirty other photographers featured in the 1996 "In/sight" exhibition, he achieved singular prominence. One of his portraits was reproduced on the catalogue cover, and others illustrated many of the reviews of the show (e.g., Cotter 1996; Squiers 1996; Kozloff 1996). At the same time, Keïta's international acclaim has been cited as a

6. Untitled portrait, 1957–1960, print 1974. Silver print; 18cm x 13cm (7" x 5"). Private collection, New York.

First published in 1991 and credited to an "unknown photographer" (Vogel 1991:161; *Revue Noire* 1991:1), this portrait has since been identified by Keïta as his own work. Familiar motifs are evident, such as the photographer's arabesque-patterned backdrop and his elegant counterbalancing of the two subjects. More atypical is the intimacy of the photographer's focus on the couple.

major impetus for expanding the study of African portrait photography, for instance in the wake of the first (1994) *Rencontres de la Photographie Africaine*, a biennial festival of African photography, held in Bamako (Mesplé 1996:6). Monographs on other African photographers' works have been openly marketed

african arts • spring 1999

as follow-ups to Keïta's phenomenal success (Scalo Press 1998).

As Keïta becomes a generative point for the reception of other African photographers, his authorship encompasses far more than an individual oeuvre. His celebration as a canonical figure is precipitous, occurring in the absence of a broad understanding of the art history of west African portrait photography and without evidence of how and to what extent his work has been significant to other practitioners.<sup>21</sup> This is most obvious when claims of his influence defy historical possibility, as in the case of a Malian journal, cited by Pascal Martin Saint Léon and Jean Loup Pivin (1998:7), which claimed that Keïta had contributed to the development of the much older Senegalese photographer Mama Casset, whose studio predated his own by decades.

In the West, Keïta's work has also been reframed according to its perceived correspondences to culturally disparate forms. For example, many have discerned similarities between his portrait of the reclining woman (Fig. 1) and nineteenth-century European figurative painting; Diawara has called it "Keïta's Olympia" (1998:68). Robert Storr has written that the portrait evokes the Orientalist pictorial tradition, an affinity he admits emerges from the beholder rather than from the work itself: "It is impossible for eyes long familiar with Delacroix, Ingres, and especially Matisse, not to see such archetypes in Keïta's picture" (Storr 1997:26). Such interpretations shift authorial dynamics in the direction of the new viewer, who comprehends the work according to its resonance with his or her inherited body of images and horizon of aesthetic expectations. This new viewer may also erroneously assume Keïta's context of production to be equivalent to that of academicians such as Delacroix and Ingres or modernists such as Matisse.

Keïta's portraits are arguably susceptible to cross-cultural comparisons because of both their medium and some aspects of the photographer's manner of using it. While not culturally coded on the same level as other pictorial media, such as easel painting, photography is a Western technological invention that Keïta's new viewers connect with the art history of the United States and Europe more than that of Africa. Further, the portraits that have inspired comparisons to Western painting (not, it should be emphasized, to Western photography) are among Keïta's most abstract; in these images all references to his studio space have been excised, leaving them more susceptible to extraction from their specific cultural contexts (Figs. 1, 5).

By contrast, another aspect of photography—its tendency to be seen as a mechanical analogue of reality, or as Barthes put it, "a message without a code" (Barthes 1961:17)—leads to a quite different framing of authorship. Generally speaking, photography requires a greater effort to discern

the artist's interventions in the production of a veristic illusion than other pictorial media, such as painting or drawing, in which those interventions are materially overt. Viewers of photographs, especially of those showing unfamiliar people or places, may consequently focus on their denotative attributes—their contents—to the exclusion of their connotative features, that is, the photographer's stylistic, compositional, or interpretive mediations (and in the case of commissioned portrait photography, the subject's own imaginative staging). Not surprisingly, some viewers of Keïta's work have treated the photographs as visual documents that allow transparent access to ethnographic, sociological, or historical information. This reading is implicit in texts which emphasize the photographs' literal contents (Cissé 1995), and in the common response to the images as revealing a new picture of Africa to Western viewers (suggested by exhibition titles such as "Das Gesicht Afrikas," or "The Face of Africa").<sup>22</sup> Certainly Keïta's portraits are an important source of information about their subjects, suggested by Youssouf Cissé's captions to the published photographs (1997). Regarding the portraits as documents, however, leads in some sense to their de-authoring, for it tends to negate the contributions of both the photographer and the subject.

Perhaps the most conspicuous authorial transformation to emerge since Keïta's work has been shown outside Mali—particularly insofar as it can be traced back to the photographer's initial absence of authorial identity—is the extent to which his portraits have achieved signature status among Western viewers. These viewers now forge connections between Keïta and his photographs that rely not only upon their knowledge of his name but equally upon their ability to identify elements of his style. This name recognition is, on the one hand, another of many instances in the history of art in which new viewers given broad exposure to an author's oeuvre have acquired skills as connoisseurs. Presumably, were a museum in New York today to exhibit a Keïta photograph as the work of an "unknown" photographer, its attribution to him would quickly follow—in New York, without an intervening trip to Bamako.

### Author Chic: Simulations in the World of Fashion

Furthermore, this shift coincides with the circulation of Keïta's now signature aesthetic in frames of viewing perhaps as different from the institutions of art as these institutions are from a living room or portrait studio in 1950s Bamako. As the prime example I offer what is among Keïta's most recent photographic works, a series of photographs commissioned by *Harper's Bazaar* for its May 1998 issue. They show local *bamakoises* modeling couture fashions, some

evidently inspired by a designer's encounter with Magnin's then recently published monograph on Keïta (Figs. 7, 8).<sup>23</sup> The extent of Keïta's involvement is unclear: *Bazaar's* fashion editor selected the models, backdrops, and clothes, and the constraints of the magazine format may have determined some aspects of the composition and camera angle. Nonetheless these fashion photographs clearly state Keïta's authorial presence: they mimic the 1950s portraits in their dense layering of fabric patterns, their reclining poses, the sense of the *mise-en-scène*'s artifice, and the exterior, mud-floored setting. Individual tropes of the photographer's portrait style are evident everywhere, apparently reified in their shift to this new frame and function of viewing (such magazines are, after all, dependent on the accumulation of value attached to fashion trademarks and logos). As this article goes to press, Keïta's *Bazaar* photographs have been nominated for a prestigious award for fashion photography.

Yet if these photographs are evidence of Keïta's present mobility in the image world of art and fashion, they are also ample evidence of the particular authorial dynamic that was so vital to the production of the images they simulate. The ways that these photographs differ from their predecessors suggest the constitutive role of authorial collaboration in the portraits.<sup>24</sup> In the portrait in Figure 1, for example, Keïta has excised all that is neither pattern nor subject and oriented his lens just slightly below the sitter: the result is an image of tight two-dimensionality, dynamic rhythm, and symmetrical balance that monumentalizes the reclining woman as a towering, expansive subject who seems to tilt just out of the picture plane. In the fashion photograph in Figure 7, the clash of patterned fabrics occurs at the perpendicular of the three-dimensional stage; here the surfaces that are so visually rich in the portrait are simply flat. The camera looks slightly down at the figure, who is further diminished by her comparatively awkward and asymmetrical location in the composition.

Differences in the subjects' demeanor and pose are also apparent (though it would be speculation to attribute agency for these characteristics, beyond their association with the divergent functions of the two images). Where the fashion subject appears self-conscious and tenuously posed, the portrait subject is immobile, impassive, and contained (both in her pose and her subjective self-presentation): she declares herself to the camera. For all that the "look" of the portraits has been reproduced in the photographs for *Harper's Bazaar*, Keïta's authorial achievement cannot be reduced to a name or a signature style. It is, rather, entrenched in a specific framework and experience of authorship, which originally involved the conjunction of the portrait photograph's intimate negotiations: of photographer and client, aesthetic practice and the marketplace, and of



COURTESY OF HARPER'S BAZAAR

the genre's conventions, Keïta's own aesthetic strategies, and individual subjects' desires. This authorial specificity is precisely what may be too easily elided in the ongoing re-authorings of his work.

### Self-(Re)Authoring

Keïta has not been a bystander to his phenomenal rise to renown.<sup>25</sup> The photographer has traveled to Europe and America to attend openings of exhibitions and to sign prints and books. His work has achieved a new status in Africa, coinciding with the escalation of interest by African photographers and scholars in historicizing a now institutionally visible

legacy through events such as the Rencontres de la Photographie Africaine in Bamako. Keïta himself has seemed at times to retrospectively reframe his status as an author. Most recently he discussed his work in a documentary video made by Brigitte Cornand (1998), for which he also agreed to be filmed as he photographed several relatives and friends against a printed fabric backdrop in the courtyard of his Bamako home. The video reveals intriguing negotiations between photographer and subject that resonate with Keïta's historical portraits: the subjects pose for the camera—some confidently and some following the photographer's careful instructions—as Keïta adjusts

Above and opposite page: 7 & 8. Untitled fashion photographs, published in *Harper's Bazaar*, May 1998.

After achieving immense renown outside Mali in the mid-1990s, Keïta was commissioned to photograph young *bamakoises* modeling couture fashions. Despite conspicuous allusions to the portrait photographs of the 1950s, such as the use of fabric backdrops and, in Figure 7, a variation on the reclining pose seen in Figure 1, these images are clearly different from the earlier works.

skirts and scarves and positions accessories such as an immense boom box.

Yet the video also records subtle shifts in authorship. For example, contrary to his previous interviews, Keïta states that on



COURTESY OF HARPER'S BAZAAR

some occasions he chose fabric backdrops to suit particular sitters, thereby diminishing the serendipitous nature of an encounter he had earlier called "haphazard" (Magnin 1995:92; 1997:12). And while Keïta has attributed his historical success in Bamako to his skills both as a photographer and as a salesman (Magnin 1997:10), the current popularity of his images is linked more securely to the aesthetic judgments of his new viewers. Although apparently initially astonished that seven photographs would impel someone to travel to Bamako to find him (Loke 1997), he does not seem to have been surprised that, once seen, his photographs would be admired. Redirecting this confidence as a

challenge to an interviewer, Keïta has said, "If you like my photographs you've got to know why. I know they're good, and that's why you like them" (Anginot 1995).

From its inclusion in the 1991 "Africa Explores" exhibition to its current visibility in Western cultural institutions and in pop-cultural outlets of international art and fashion, Seydou Keïta's work has, in a relatively short time, come to circulate in cultural milieus with only a nascent understanding of the broader history of portrait photography in West Africa. It may be hoped that new historical studies (Wendl & Behrend 1998) will result in an enriched understanding of the precedents and criteria that shaped Keïta's studio practice. Just

as important, such studies may lead to a deeper comprehension of what, from his clients' perspective, set his work apart from that of his competitors, and perhaps offer some sense of how clients perceived their own authorial roles. Without a contextualized understanding, it is all too easy for Keïta's images to become more permanently re-authored by their new viewers and in their new contexts. And lacking such a history, it is all too easy for the specificities of this work and its authorship to be glossed over, taken at face value, or to circulate simply as simulacrum. This would indeed be to lose a richer picture of both Keïta's oeuvre and its authors. □

Notes, page 94

tive institutions. During the 1950s Columbia University's art history department began its uninterrupted teaching of African art; Nelson Rockefeller, one of the nation's most visible and respected collectors, opened his Museum of Primitive Art. In 1968 the museum's collections were exhibited and transferred to the Metropolitan Museum, whose director, Thomas Hoving, announced that the acquisition completed the last chapter of the great encyclopedia of world art that was the Metropolitan. Many remained skeptical. Other leading art institutions, however—the National Gallery of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, Yale's Art Gallery, and its art history department—integrated African art into their programs in sustained and substantial ways, and UCLA began to support the publication of this journal, *African Arts*, the first on the subject.

8. It is discouraging to note that this same debate was heard loudly again in the general press in New York as well as in London during the recent exhibition "Africa: The Art of a Continent," organized by the Royal Academy of Arts and the Guggenheim Museum.

9. For a record of this exhibition see Vogel 1980. The exhibition included three objects by the Buli Master and half a dozen objects by other named artists which were compared with related sculptures by unknown artists.

10. In the last decade, for example, the Smithsonian, Harvard University, and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts have made major commitments.

11. Personal communication, August 1990.

12. Some of the earliest field studies on sub-Saharan artists were conducted there. The most detailed information about traditional master carvers was gleaned early (1940s–50s) by Kenneth Murray, Kevin Carroll, William Fagg, and John Picton (beginning in 1961) in inquiries specifically about artists at a time when information was relatively plentiful—many Yoruba masters were still living or only recently deceased. In the nearly half century since that time, several generations of scholars of many different persuasions have also worked on Yoruba artists, so that today we benefit from over a half century of sustained and cumulative work on Yoruba woodcarvers.

13. At least one sculptor of *ibejì* twin figures marked the bottoms of at least some of his pieces with an incised triangle, but we can only guess at his intentions. Roslyn Walker convincingly disputes the idea put forth by Fagg that the "saltire within an rectangle" was a virtual signature of Olowe of Ise (in Abiodun, Drexel & Pemberton 1994:103).

14. See the couple in Vogel 1998:236; the male figure in Sweeney 1935: fig. 69. Interestingly, a number of figures in this style have come out of Ivory Coast in the 1990s, and fakes have also appeared.

15. See Vogel 1981:74–75 for a discussion of this corpus. A male figure in this style is in the Musée de l'Homme collection, but it appears to have lost its documentation. The catalogue information and number it currently bears (00.29.1) are those of a female figure collected by Delafosse in 1900. The male figure probably entered the collection in the 1930s. See Vogel 1997:250 for this history.

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#### BIGHAM: Notes, from page 67

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1. As of October 1998, the Museum of Modern Art's Department of Photography owned three portrait photographs by Keita, all 1997 prints of portraits made in the 1950s. The Metropolitan Museum of Art owns four: three reside in the Photograph Study Collection, Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas; the fourth is held by the Department of Photographs.

2. Keita does not know the year of his birth; it is variously cited as 1923 (Magnin 1995:91; Cissé 1995; Bell et al. 1996:268) and 1921 (Magnin 1997:9; Loke 1997) One notes other discrepancies regarding dates. For example, the studio was established in 1948 according to both Keita and his uncle (Magnin 1997:9, 17), but in 1949 according to Cissé and Zaya (in Bell 1996:268). I have chosen to follow the dates provided by Keita in a 1995–96 interview with André Magnin, as it provides greater detail. I must acknowledge the monograph in which it is published (Magnin 1997) as a valuable source of information.

3. I have not yet had the opportunity to interview Keita's subjects about their authorial roles, and Keita's retirement precludes my observation of their activities in his studio. My discussion is based on the photographer's own accounts and the images themselves.

4. Although the re-authoring process primarily involved exhibitions and publications of the 1990s, it has come to include new multimedia outlets of pop-cultural commerce. In October 1998, for example, a modest search of the World Wide Web yielded 67 matches for Seydou Keita. Scores of his photographs can be viewed on the Internet. Keita's work is also accessible in a CD-ROM that includes 300 images and commentaries by the photographer himself, Dominique Anginot, André Magnin, and others (Anginot 1995).

5. This is not to say that a poststructuralist such as Barthes cannot be guilty of essentializing authorship. He proposes the following as a reductive foil to the modern, Western model of the autonomous author: "In ethnographic societies the responsibility for a narrative is never assumed by a person but by a mediator, shaman, or relator whose 'performance'—the mastery of the narrative code—may possibly be admired but never his genius" (1967:142).

6. This liberatory aspect of Barthes's and Foucault's critiques of authorship resonated with the contemporary Western art of their time, especially conceptual art. Séan Burke (1998) provides a useful analysis of Barthes's and Foucault's texts and a survey of their many critics.

7. See considerations of the collaborative aspect of Keita's work by Okwui Enwezor and Octavio Zaya (in Bell et al. 1996:33) and Kobena Mercer (1995), as well as Susan Vogel's discussion of it as a shared quality of African portrait photography (1991:116).

8. Keita dates his work according to his fabric backdrops. In 1949–52 he used a fringed bedspread; in 1952–55 a backdrop with a small floral print; in 1956 a backdrop with a bold leaf pattern; in 1957–1960 a backdrop with an arabesque pattern; and in 1960–64 a solid gray background (Magnin 1997:12; Geary 1996; Cissé 1995). The dates of some portraits (e.g., Fig. 4) do not correspond to those provided for the backdrops.

9. Compare a 1994 Keita interview (Magnin 1995:91) and 1995–96 interviews with Keita and his uncle (Magnin 1997:9, 16). Youssouf Cissé (1995) and Octavio Zaya (in Bell et al. 1996:268) date this event to 1945. See also note 2.

10. The photographer lists his portrait fees during the 1950s as follows: each session resulted in a minimum of three prints, priced according to size (6 cm x 9 cm, 25 francs; 9 cm x 12 cm, 100 francs; 13 cm x 18 cm, 150 francs); naturally lit sessions (which Keita preferred) were cheaper than those using artifi-

cial lighting (300 vs. 400 francs) (Magnin 1997:10–11). The most inexpensive commission, then, would have cost 375 francs. The CFA franc, the currency of the former French West African states, was used in Mali until 1962. In 1954 a loaf of bread cost 50 CFA francs; a pack of cigarettes, 25 francs (Imperato 1982:300).

11. Keita identifies his prime competitors as Youssouf Cissé, Moustapha Traoré (also of Bamako-Koura), Mountaga Traoré (in Medina-Koura), and Abderramane Sakaly (in Medina-Koura). Malick Sidibé, also the subject of exhibitions in France and a monograph (Magnin 1998), was of a younger generation, and better known for photographs of club life than for portraits. See statements about Keita's competitors by the photographer and his uncle (Magnin 1997:10, 17), and an essay on Sakaly in Tobias Wendl and Heike Behrend's study of African studio photography (1998).

12. Keita worked consistently in black-and-white; he has said that he prefers it to color film both on aesthetic grounds and given its greater resistance to discoloration (Magnin 1995:13). The only exceptions I have seen were commissioned by *Harper's Bazaar* for their May 1998 issue (see later discussion in this article). The increased popularity of color photography, particularly since the 1980s, has required many African studio photographers to cede a significant chunk of their profits to external labs that develop their prints; this issue is incisively addressed in Wendl and du Plessis' film on Ghanaian practitioners (1998) and in Warner's study of Ivorian studio photographers (1998).

13. Probably the Musée National, although Keita does not name it.

14. In that issue of *Revue Noire* (no. 3, 1991, no. 3:1), the Center for African Art is credited as the photograph's source. *Revue Noire* has played a large role in the interpretation of African photography in France through its journal coverage, exhibitions it has organized, such as a 1992 survey of Senegalese portrait photographers, and associated publications such as the series *Éditions Revue Noire-Collection Soleil* and *Anthologie de la Photographie Africaine et de la Océan Indien* (1998).

15. The exhibitions of which I am thus far aware all postdate "Africa Explores" (see notes 17, 20). None have been identified by other scholars.

16. Magnin continues to act as liaison between the photographer and galleries wishing to sell or exhibit his work. See Magnin's catalogue of Pigozzi's contemporary African painting and sculpture collection (1991) and John Picton's commentary on the CAAC (1993); see also Dagmar Sinz's interview with Magnin, who discusses his role as its curator (1993).

17. Keita's exhibitions in France include one curated by Magnin and Hervé Chardès for the Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain in Paris in 1994. His work was previously exhibited in France in 1993, in conjunction with two photography festivals: the third Rencontres Photographiques in Rouen and the Rencontres Internationales de Photographie in Arles.

18. Magnin's presence as questioner is removed from these interviews (Magnin 1995, 1997), so Keita's statements read as a continuous narrative. This elision might be contrasted to the approach taken by Johannes Fabian in his published

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17. I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete. (Signed) Sylvia S.J. Kennedy, Operations Manager.

interviews with the painter Tshibumba (Fabian 1996).  
19. The National Museum of African Art, "Seydou Keïta, Photographer: Portraits from Bamako, Mali (1950–1960)," March 27–July 28, 1996; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, February 14–June 3, 1997; and the Saint Louis Art Museum, September 22, 1998–January 3, 1999. At each of these venues, the prints were loaned by the CAAC.

Keïta has also been visible in Europe. A small group of his photographs was included in "Africa Africa," organized by Images of Africa and presented in 1993 in Copenhagen, Denmark (Boyesen 1993). In conjunction with "Africa 95," he participated in the group exhibitions "Self-Evident," at the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham, England, and "Big City: Artists from Africa," at the Serpentine Gallery in London. Most recently Keïta appeared in the May 1998 exhibition "L'Afrique par Elle-même: Exposition de Photographes Africains," at the Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris.

20. The exhibition was curated by Clare Bell, Okwui Enwezor, and Danielle Tilkin. "In/sight" featured thirty photographers representing many genres and artistic and conceptual projects; they ranged from the Senegalese portraitist Meïssa Gaye (1892–1982) to the Nigerian-American artist Iké Udé (b. 1964).  
21. Abigail Solomon-Godeau's account of the transformation of the early-twentieth-century stock photographer Eugène Atget into the canonical founding author of modernist photography provides interesting analogies. Atget's metamorphosis was likewise founded on the transposition of the 5,000 prints and negatives remaining in his studio at the time of his death to institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art (Solomon-Godeau 1991:28–51).

22. "Das Gesicht Afrikas, Selbstbildnis eines Kontinents: Westafrikanische Gebrauchsfotografie aus fünf Jahrzehnten" (Hamburger Pressehaus, November 14–December 9, 1997). Keïta's portraits have in some sense acquired a new representational function as documents. For example, many of the reviews of the Guggenheim's "In/sight" exhibition exuberantly welcomed these images as unquestionable refutations of the Western mass media's persistently negative, exoticizing, or monolithic stereotypes of the continent. One writer has argued the opposite view: that Keïta's renown in the West is symptomatic of persistent negative stereotypes of Africa (Rangasamy 1995).

23. Eve MacSweeney (1998:172) explains that "a fashion editor took some of the most beautiful dresses of the season to their place of inspiration—Africa. She then rounded up some of the loveliest girls in...Bamako, where they were photographed by local hero[,] internationally acclaimed artist....[and] surprise darling of the fashion world Seydou Keïta." One year earlier the same magazine had published a notice of Keïta's exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art that was also titled "Sunday Best" (Als 1997:121).

A 1997 Janet Jackson music video also apparently appropriates the "Keïta look": shot in black-and-white, it shows a man posing astride a bicycle placed in front of a patterned fabric backdrop.

24. The comparison of these two images was greatly aided by a conversation with Virginia-Lee Webb.

25. Neither has Keïta been silent about the consequences of his portraits' relocation from Bamako-Koura to the world art market. In 1995–96 he commented: "I left some negatives in Europe....Ever since my work has been known in your country, I've had a lot of visitors, but I prefer to leave things to one person" (Magnin 1997:14). In an exchange with the *New York Times*, Keïta complained of the paucity of his economic rewards for the sale and publication of his photographs; the journalist interprets his complaint as defensive discretion, given the severe poverty of many Malians (French 1997).

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### SILVERMAN: Notes, from page 92

- I participated as one of the contributors to the field research essays included on the CD. However, I wish to point out that I have absolutely no vested interest in promoting it.
- Here is a list of the authors and titles of the thirty-seven essays: Martha Anderson, "Art from the Ijo Spirit World"; Mary Jo Arnoldi, "Puppet Masquerades in the Valley of the Niger"; Lisa Aronson, "Weaving in Southern Nigeria"; Barbara Blackmun, "Art and Rule in the Benin Kingdom"; Arthur Bourgeois, "Art and Initiation among the Yaka and Suku"; Herbert Cole, "Mbari: Art as Process in Igbo Land"; Herbert Cole, "Igbo Art in Social Context"; Joseph Cornell, "Kuba Art and Rule"; Kathy Curnow, "Benin Kingdom Leadership Regalia"; Henry Drewal, "Yoruba Gelede Masquerade"; Margaret Thompson Drewal, "Yoruba Performance"; Kate Ezra, "Bamana Art and Initiation"; Barbara Frank, "Bamana Women's Pottery"; Michelle Gilbert, "Akan Leadership Art and Ceremony"; Anita Glaze, "Art and Death in a Semufo Village"; Rachel Hoffman, "Textiles in Mali"; Hans-Joachim Koloss, "Royal Art in the Cameroon Grasslands"; Sandra Klopfer, "Young Women in Contemporary Zulu Society"; Manuel Jordán, "Art and Initiation in Western Zambia"; Patrick McNaughton, "Art of the Bamana Blacksmith"; Diane Pehrine, "Art and Life Among the Zaramo of Tanzania"; John Pemberton III, "Ifa Divination"; Ruth Phillips, Henrietta Cosentino, and Rebecca Busselle, "Women's Art and Initiation in Mendeland"; Donna Pido, "Art among the Maasai of Kenya"; Allen Roberts, "Islam and Islamic Art in Africa"; Allen Roberts, "The Status of Dogon Visual Culture"; Mary Nooter Roberts, "Luba Art and Divination"; Doran Ross, "Akan Leadership Arts"; Doran Ross, "Military Arts of the Fante"; Christopher Roy, "Nature, Spirits and Arts in Burkina Faso"; Enid Schildkrout, "Mangbetu Royal Art and Herbert Lang, 1902-1906"; William Siegmann, "Masquerades Among the Dan People"; Raymond Silverman, "Akan Brass Casting"; Fred Smith, "Art and Architecture in Northern Ghana"; Robert Sopelsa, "Art and Death in Southern Côte d'Ivoire"; Zoë Strother, "Art and Masquerading among the Pende"; Norma Wolff, "Art and Death in a Yoruba Community."
- I noticed many students printing much of the text-intensive material they encountered on the computer. This may be due, in part, to the fact that not all students had ready access to a computer.
- The teacher's guide also is available in hardcopy from the University of Iowa Art and Life in Africa Project.

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